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## ABSTRACT

The paper explores the issue of mainstreaming and reviews some of the literature relevant to the educational environment of mentally handicapped children. Various viewpoints such as ambiguous efficacy results, effects on self-concept, lack of mainstream services, rejection of retarded children by normal peers, and racial segregation in special classes are reviewed. Factors that have created difficulty in the implementation of the concept of mainstreaming are discussed. It is concluded that until adequate resources and well trained personnel are provided for the implementation of programs it will not be possible to adequately evaluate the effectiveness of mainstreaming. (Author/DB)

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## Mainstreaming -- Panacea or Pandora's Box

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## Abstract

This paper explores the issue of mainstreaming and reviews some of the literature relevant to the educational environment of mentally handicapped children. Various viewpoints are reported, and the development of mainstreaming is briefly reviewed. Factors that have created difficulty in the implementation of the concept of mainstreaming are discussed. The conclusion is reached that until adequate resources and well-trained personnel are provided for the implementation of programs we cannot adequately evaluate the effectiveness of mainstreaming.

## Mainstreaming -- Panacea or Pandora's Box

Although Public Law 94-142 was passed to protect the rights of handicapped children, current implementation procedures have not met the needs of all handicapped children, specifically not those of children who are categorized as mild/moderate mentally handicapped and severe/profound mentally handicapped. It is believed that in order to correct the program inadequacies for some children, we have denied others "the right to be different" (Zigler & Hall, 1986, p. 2).

This paper explores the issue of mainstreaming and reviews some of the literature relevant to the educational environment of mentally handicapped children. Various viewpoints are reported. Prior to reviewing the comments in the literature germane to the practice of mainstreaming, it is appropriate to briefly review the development of the conceptual base for this practice.

As special education programs began to grow and develop in the late 1950s, parents and special education professional groups began to advocate more comprehensive services for all handicapped students. Parents organized as active lobbyists and encouraged more comprehensive educational programs for the handicapped in state and federal programs.

Prior to 1970 there were a number of studies which attempted to determine the effectiveness of special self-contained classroom

programs for educable mentally retarded (EMR) students (Ainsworth, 1959; Blatt, 1958; Thurstone, 1959; Warren, 1962 and many others). Students in special classes were compared to students with similar IQ's in regular classes. These studies showed that the academic performance of students in regular classes who received no special help was equal to or better than that of students in special classes students (Altman & Meyen, 1975; Goldstein, Moss & Jordan, 1965; Semmel, Gottlieb & Robinson, 1979).

Leinhardt and Pally (1982) questioned these results pointing to subject selection bias, "watered down" curricula and less effective teaching in the special programs. However, despite the fact that these studies were not always methodologically sound, many special educators modified their opinions about the effectiveness of special class programs in the period preceding the 1970's.

The efficacy of self contained special classes was questioned on the grounds that separation created poor self-concepts, and diminished expectations. In addition, special students were thought to be overly stigmatized and deprived of needed contact with brighter students (Leikdowitz, 1972; Kirp, 1974; Milofsky, 1974; Hadermann, 1976). Special educators also believed that labels produced harmful effects independently of other factors, such as students' performance.

Diagnostic procedures which placed children in special classes were criticized as being racially and ethnically biased. Legal cases also gave impetus to providing integrated education for handicapped students (Larry P. vs. Riles). Court decisions upheld the right of all children to an appropriate education and encouraged or required that it be provided in the most normal setting possible.

Least restrictive environment evolved from a disenchantment with special classes and the influence of the socio-political atmosphere of the late 70's. The result was the inclusion in PL 94-142 of the least restrictive environment as one of its basic principles. Shrinking enrollment in the schools created an increased interest in reducing self-contained special education classes and increasing the use of more integrated settings. (Leinhard & Pallay, 1982). With increasing financial problems, school systems used the concept of mainstreaming to justify a decrease in the number of special education classrooms resulting in an increased number of handicapped students in regular classes. A small percentage of children, those with severe handicapping conditions, remained in special classes, but many children who had previously been classified as EMR were not retained in regular classes with resource rooms and special education teachers.

The definition of mainstreaming set forth by the Council for Exceptional Children includes far more than the educational

setting. It also includes individually determined educational planning and programming:

Mainstreaming refers to the temporal, instructional, and social integration of eligible exceptional children with normal peers based on an ongoing, individually determined, educational planning and programming process and requires clarification of responsibility among regular and special education administrative, instructional, and supportive personnel. p. 5 (Hasazil, 1980)

The practical definition used for "compliance" requires that the handicapped child spends 50% or more of his school day under the supervision of a regular class teacher. Thus, the most common definitional parameter of mainstreaming encountered is the amount of time handicapped children are integrated with nonhandicapped peers.

Researchers and educators questioned the value of mainstreaming shortly after its implementation. Positions on the positive and negative aspects of mainstreaming are diverse (Chassin, Stager, & Young, 1985; Galloway, 1985; Klein, Pasch, & Frew, 1979; Langone, 1986; McNergney & Haberman, 1986; Meisel, 1986; Moss, 1958; Murray, 1986; Rauth, 1981; Semmel, 1979; Siperstein & Bak, 1986; Ziger & Hall, 1986). Those who believed that mainstreaming would help integrate the mentally handicapped student into the "mainstream" of American life applauded the

changes in the administrative structure of the special classes.

However, there were those who suggested that the changes were primarily administrative. They contended new educational techniques or approaches were not introduced. According to Semmel (1979) the main expectation was not that children would do better, but simply that EMR children in special classes would do no worse in mainstreamed classes. This expectation has been confirmed.

Zigler and Muenchow (1980) challenged mainstreaming referring to it as "the trading of poor care for no care at all" and compared this phenomenon to deinstitutionalization (which has now been found to be deleterious for large numbers of children). Rauth (1981) doubted whether children were truly being given "appropriate" educational services as required by Public Law 94-142. He also disputed the placement of retarded children in a regular classroom, as if they were functioning normally. He contended that the cost factor, rather than the well being of the student, was the major consideration. Placement in educational programs was decided by people who were not knowledgeable about teaching retarded children. In addition, he maintained that regular teachers became frustrated because they were unable to meet the needs of these children, and consequently, the regular classroom ceased to be a positive learning environment for either the special child or the normal child. Special education teachers had many students in the mainstreamed setting, but were not given

time to consult with the regular classroom teachers and vice versa.

Zigler and Hall (1986) alleged that least restrictive environment has simply meant least expensive. They further cautioned that we should not mainstream handicapped children excluding them from training programs that will enable them to become socially competent and independent adults. Langone (1986) concurred stating that mainstreaming is less expensive than special classes whether it is or is not the least restrictive environment. He asserted that too much emphasis was placed on the quantity of time spent in the regular classroom rather than on the quality of time.

Proponents of mainstreaming believed that retarded students would watch their normal peers in the regular classroom and model their behavior. However, Snyder, Appoloni, and Cooke (1981) indicated that mainstreamed children did not imitate their classmates unless instructed by their teacher to do so. They found that mainstreamed retarded children were rejected more than their non-retarded classmates. Siperstein and Bak (1986) also contended that mainstreaming does not promote interaction or imitation. They reported that instead children develop a more negative attitude, as they get older, toward their peers who are retarded.

Another postulation has been that special classes resulted in

racial segregation, with a disproportionate number of minority groups placed in special classes. This was rebutted by Zigler and Hall (1986) who asserted that with mainstreaming in full swing, this is still the case.

Proponents also maintained that mainstreaming resulted in cognitive benefits for both normal and mentally handicapped children. However, Murray (1986) found no clearcut proof of this for either group of children.

Gresham (1986b) presented an argument for increased emphasis and consideration of social competence in handicapped children, particularly as it relates to the mainstreaming process. His central thesis was that the outcomes of mainstreaming have been disappointing, because of the faulty assumptions on which the practice of mainstreaming was based. His review (1982a) of 40 studies demonstrated that mainstreaming had not lived up to its original expectations.

Galloway (1985) reported that much time and effort is spent on making the child adjust to the school instead of having the teacher and the school adjust to the child and his special needs. He substantiates other research which implies that problems are created in these types of programs. For example, the fact that the mainstreamed child is expected to adjust back and forth between two completely different settings was referred to by Tymitz-Wolf (1984).

Leinhardt and Pally (1982) determined that borderline children do suffer from an isolated setting, but that mild and moderately retarded students appear to do better in a self-contained setting. Their findings were not in agreement with the idea that isolated students had a lower self-concept. Results of their study supported the idea that setting is not as important as what education occurs in the setting. The self-contained setting was an easier place to apply many behaviorist programs which must be monitored tightly. They also reported that students in self-contained classrooms did better on achievement tests than did their IQ equals in the regular classroom. They concluded that self-contained classes provide a more appropriate curriculum which concentrates on life skills.

Chassin, Stager and Young (1985) found that mentally retarded students in a mainstreamed situation had no change in their overall self-concept. Meisel (1986) determined that many academically inferior students did not want to compare themselves to their classmates since the results were usually negative.

Siperstein and Bak (1986) found that many nonhandicapped children have unfavorable attitudes toward the mentally retarded. Because of their academic behavior and also their appearance when it varied from that of normal children, they were viewed negatively. However, in some instances they found that the label of mental retardation served a protective function. From all of

their studies they concluded that we cannot adequately assess children's attitudinal responses toward their mentally retarded peers without taking into account peer group pressures that are a part of children's social context.

What about the attitudes of those children who are mentally retarded and mainstreamed? Barbara Tymitz-Wolf interviewed EMR children in self-contained special education classrooms awaiting placement in regular classes and compared their responses with those of EMR students already assigned part-time to regular classrooms. The EMR students expressed a range of worries related to academic performance, social interactions and the transitions inherent in split placement. Tymitz-Wolf hypothesized that perhaps mainstreamed students experienced anxiety in the self-contained classrooms, because they could no longer maintain continuity or even choose to identify with that class.

It is imperative that we, as special educators, take another look at mainstreaming. The idea was conceptually sound, perhaps, but the method of implementation has not been effective, particularly as it relates to mentally handicapped children. Studies have indicated for some time that the mainstreaming of mentally handicapped students has not been effective for various reasons. However, research does support the practice of mainstreaming for children who are borderline, between mentally handicapped and normal; thus, mainstreaming has been workable for

only a small portion of mentally handicapped students.

From all of the literature and our own individual experiences we are faced with the question of what may be concluded regarding the positive effects of mainstreaming. We have some evidence to support that mainstreaming handicapped children who are not mentally retarded may be beneficial. However, to mainstream the mild/moderate mentally retarded student should not be an overriding objective. In debating the idea of where to teach these children we have lost sight of our major concern, which should be what to teach them. We must direct our attention not only to the setting in which education occurs, but to education itself. Historically, in special education the curriculum for mild/moderate has been geared toward learning and practicing the skills necessary for self-sufficient living in society. This goal is ever more important in our increasingly complex society.

Ideally, Public Law 94-142 was to provide a free, appropriate public education in the most appropriate "least restrictive" environment. Perhaps, in pursuing the implementation of least restrictive environment we have lost sight of what is most appropriate for mildly handicapped students. In the best possible scenario, professionals would provide alternatives for parents to choose among in the best interest of their child (Duff, 1983). However, before this can be achieved, we must be realistic and recognize that effective mainstreaming of mentally handicapped

children is a very expensive undertaking. At the present time Public Law 94-142 provides for less than 10% of the money needed to implement the changes it requires (Ziger and Hall, 1986).

I suggest that instead of providing a panacea for these children who have been mainstreamed we have instead opened an allegorical "Pandora's Box" and are now faced with a new set of problems generated by attempting to mainstream children who in all probability cannot find success under the present organizational structure of the schools.

Another factor that must be considered is the growing emphasis on academics in the school setting. Rather than teaching the mentally retarded student the skills necessary for survival in school and in society, their curricula are geared to providing academic success (e.g. the "back to basics" movement) with an eye toward future success in secondary and college programs. These programs will not be available to those mentally handicapped students who are functioning two standard deviations below normal. The emphasis on academics in the core curriculum makes the secondary curricula in special education nonfunctional as related to the stated goals of special education. Edgar (1987) suggests a radical change in secondary programs for mildly handicapped students, away from academics and toward functional, vocational programs.

The problems escaping from "Pandora's Box" have shown us that

the current organization of special education is failing. Not because of the worthiness of the concept of mainstreaming but because financial resources have not been provided. With the present availability of finances in school systems throughout the United States and the support given to the implementation of mainstreaming, it is unrealistic to expect that the regular classroom teacher will be trained and capable of providing the necessary program modifications for those mentally retarded children who are placed in her classroom. Support services for regular education teachers, time for consultation with special education teachers, and other services have not been provided. Instead we find insufficient personnel with a limited amount of time trying to comply with the law. Individualization of instruction has become a mass procedure designed to appear to be in compliance with the law without taking into account the individual needs of each child.

Until we provide adequate resources and well-trained personnel who have sufficient time to develop model programs and minimize programmatic problems associated with unsuccessful results, we cannot fairly evaluate the effectiveness of mainstreaming. Optimistically, in an ideal situation we would realize the panacea implicit in mainstreaming for mentally handicapped students.

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